



Project Name & Address: 415 W Gilman Street

Application Type: Demolition Historic Value Review

Legistar File ID # [91234](#)

Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division

Date Prepared: January 7, 2026

Summary

Relevant Ordinance Section:

28.185(7) Review for Historic Value. Every application for demolition or removal of a principal structure shall be reviewed by the Landmarks Commission, which shall provide input to the Building Inspection Division regarding the historic value of the property with the building or structure proposed for demolition or removal.

- (a) If the Landmarks Commission determines that the property with the proposed demolition or the structure proposed for removal has no known historic value, the demolition or removal may be approved administratively under sub. (8)(b) below, provided that at least one of the standards for administrative approval have been met.
- (b) If the Landmarks Commission determines that the property with the proposed demolition or the structure proposed for removal has historic value, then the Plan Commission shall approve the demolition or removal under sub. (9) below, after considering input from the Landmarks Commission.
- (c) Nothing in this subsection eliminates the requirement in MGO Secs. [41.09](#)(1)(c) and [41.12](#)(3) that the demolition of landmark structures or structures in historic districts must also be approved by the Landmarks Commission through the issuance of a Certificate of Approval.

41.28 HISTORIC VALUE ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION

- (1) Review for Historic Value. Following a review of MGO Sec. 28.185 applications for demolition by the Landmarks Commission and based upon application materials, and a report by the City's Preservation Planner, and any public testimony, the Commission shall review [MGO Sec. 28.185](#) applications for demolition and assign one of the following Categories to each principal building proposed for demolition:
 - (a) Category A Demolitions: denotes that the Landmarks Commission finds that the building has historic value based on architectural significance, cultural significance, historic significance, as the work/product of an architect of note, its status as a contributing structure in a National Register Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and/or as an intact or rare example of a certain architectural style or method of construction.
 - (b) Category B Demolitions: denotes that the Landmarks Commission finds that the building has historic value related to the vernacular context of Madison's built environment, cultural practices, or as the work/product of an architect of note, but the building itself is not historically, architecturally or culturally significant.
 - (c) Category C Demolitions: denotes that the Landmarks Commission finds that the building has no known historic value. This category may also denote sites or properties that have historic value, and the significance will not be negatively impacted by the removal of the building itself. This category may also include sites or properties that have archaeological or other site findings of significance, but where removal of the building itself will have no impact.
- (2) Presence of Archaeology. When applicable, each finding shall also note the presence of an archaeological or burial site on the site of the building proposed for demolition.

415 W Gilman Street

Commercial building constructed in 1966.



Google Streetview



Google Earth

Applicant: Jason Doornbos, LCD Acquisitions

Applicant's Comments: Structure: This rectangular-shaped parcel is approximately 0.30-acres in size and has the corresponding parcel number of 0709-232-0105-1. This parcel is developed with a 7-story apartment building known as Master Hall, was constructed in 1966 and includes approximately 37,490 SF (gross). The building was transformed from a student dormitory to apartments in 1972. There are approximately 110 apartment units. There are parking and drive lanes to the south and east of the building. The property is completely developed. Method: Demolition will be mechanical, including the use of straight boom excavators with hydraulic hammer, hydraulic shear, bucket, and claw implements.

Staff Findings: There is no preservation file. There is a State site file, which incorrectly identifies the architects as Weiler & Strang. Historian Michael Bridgeman wrote an article about the history and significance of the building (see attached) and his summary correctly identifies this as the architect as George Miller, which matches the building permit. Miller primarily designed buildings in Milwaukee. This Brutalist-style building with its Expressionist cube forms is unique in Madison. The building was constructed in a time when there was a boom in student population in Madison. Most of the new private dormitory buildings were very simple buildings whereas this building had cutting-edge design. Staff has communicated to the applicants that I believe this building is architecturally significant. They have not proposed any forms of mitigation for their proposed demolition of this building. Brutalist architecture in Madison is typically found on the public buildings constructed at the time, whereas this was a private dormitory. There is no previously identified archaeology on this property.

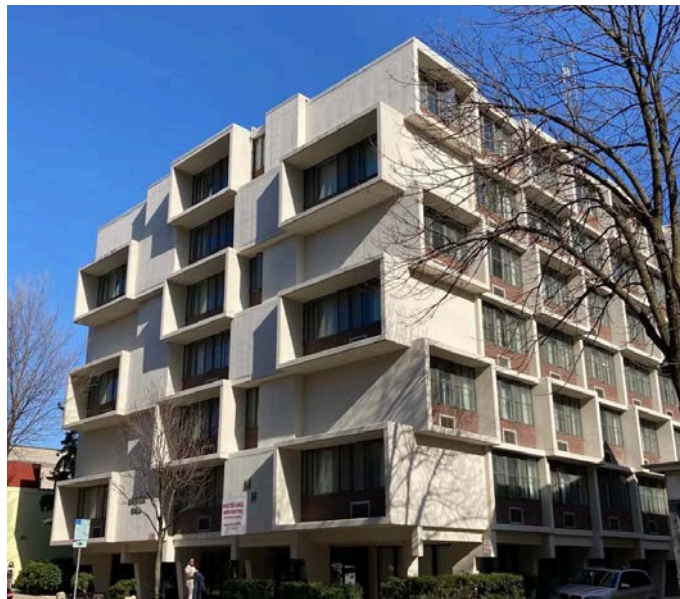
Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends a finding of (a) historic value for its significant Brutalism Expressionism architecture.

MASTER HALL & PRIVATE DORMS

March 31, 2021

BY MICHAEL BRIDGEMAN

Master Hall caught my eye not long after I moved to Madison in the early 1980s. I was struck by its sculptural presence, the most modern building on a quiet, one-way stretch of Gilman Street between University Avenue and State Street. Nearly forty years, later I still like Master Hall. It's both a reminder of its period and a point of reference for what has happened since it was built.



Master Hall at 415 W. Gilman St. was built as a “private dormitory” and opened in 1965. (Photograph: Michael Bridgeman)

A brief item in the June 20, 1964, *Capital Times* reported: “A seven-story dormitory which will house 240 university students will be built at 413-415 W. Gilman St. by Master Hall, Inc., owned by a group of Milwaukee men...” The building permit was issued in January 1965.

which grew into Miller Meier Kenyon Cooper Architects and Engineers Inc.—became known for big projects like Milwaukee’s Main Post Office (1968), [which was sold for private redevelopment in 2015](#), and a terminal expansion at Mitchell International Airport (1985).

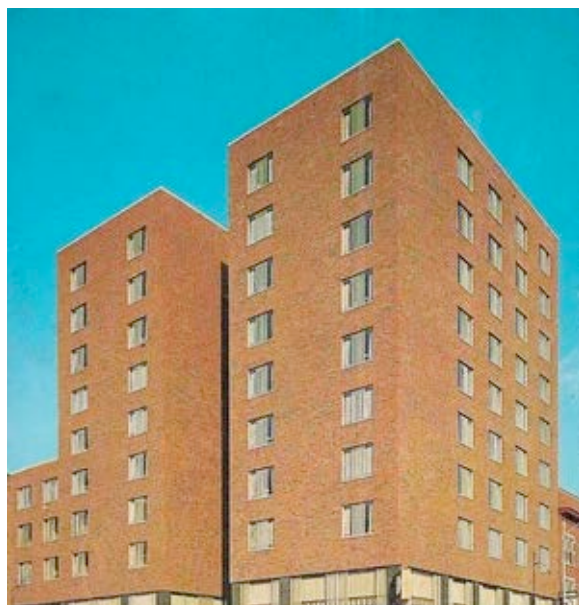
Master Hall appeals to me for its cubic form suggesting stacked boxes (or Jenga blocks) that create an alternating pattern on the sides and project more boldly on the Gilman Street façade. Master Hall combines reinforced concrete, brick and glass, so some might call it Brutalist, though the concrete is smooth and painted off-white, which softens the visual impact.

Madison architect James Potter described Master Hall as an International Style building in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, writing that it “reflects an outward construction that emphasizes its interior uses.” That use was a private dormitory for single men, two descriptions that may ring as positively quaint to modern ears.

When Master Hall opened in 1965, private dormitories, segregated by sex as were the on-campus dorms, were an established and rapidly expanding part of the housing scene in neighborhoods near UW-Madison. The university provided a certain amount of housing, especially for freshmen and sophomores, while developers saw business potential in building private sector accommodations. “[The] private market wants a tight market and the University a loose market,” said Newell Smith, director of student housing for the university before State Assembly committee in 1968. There were developers, and some legislators, who argued that the private sector could better meet student housing demand and decried “indirect subsidies” that kept campus dormitory costs below market rates.

The demand for housing was undeniable. Campuses across the country felt the post-war Baby Boom as the first wave reached college age in 1964. Enrollments at UW-Madison skyrocketed from 13,740 undergraduates and total enrollment of 18,811 in the fall of 1960 to 24,392 undergraduates and total enrollment of 34,388 in the fall of 1970.

The decade brought three new university dorms to the southeast campus and a host of private sector dorms including Master Hall. Private, off-campus accommodations have always been needed to house UW-Madison students, whether single rooms, rooming houses, fraternities/sororities, apartments, coops, or private dorms. “Independent” dormitories like [Ann Emery Hall](#) were initially available for women only. It wasn’t until 1962 that the *Capital Times* reported plans for “what was believed to be the first large private hall for men students” on Langdon Street.



The Statesider). On the Allen Hall postcard above, mailed in 1964, the correspondent declared, “This gem of a dorm is air conditioned, no less—with telephones in every room.” (Images: Postcards published by Fagan, author’s collection)

A Student Tenant Union representative told the *Wisconsin State Journal* in 1967. “We don’t need fancy carpeting and swimming pools... . All we need is private 12-by-12 rooms, good heat, sound-proofing, and the basic facilities.” The same article reported room-only units in a private dorm for men rented for \$61 for double rooms and \$50 for a single room. Women living in private dorms that included meal service paid from \$108 per month at The Towers to \$175 at Lowell Hall [1], which, in fact, had a swimming pool.

At the same time, college students across the country were demanding more autonomy and in 1968 a UW-Madison faculty committee recommended “an end to regulation of [students’] off-campus personal lives.” They further recommended that all students age 20 and older—not just seniors and grad students —“be regarded as adult with respect to their choice of housing.” That brought about the end of sex-specific housing and by the 1970s some residence halls at UW-Madison were going co-ed. The same was true in private dorms.

to 31,185 undergraduates and total enrollment of 45,317 (as of the fall of 2019). Student housing—public and private—continues to sprout. Brendon Dybdahl, director of marketing and communications for UW-Madison University Housing, told me, “Our priority has been to accommodate all first-year students who want to live on campus (UW-Madison has no on-campus housing requirements), which was a main reason for the [new residence halls that were built between 2006 and 2012](#) (Smith, Ogg, Dejope, Leopold), to add capacity.”

As the university adds housing capacity, so does the private sector with buildings that seem bigger and flashier than ever. Among them is [The James, \(2016\) at Gorham and Bassett Streets](#), which has a roof-top pool and hot tub.

Through the decades Master Hall has updated [its 108 cozy studio apartments](#). On the outside it hasn’t changed much since it opened 56 years ago, maintaining its distinctive character and still catching my eye.



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[1] Lowell Hall at 610 Langdon St. now serves as a [UW-Madison Conference Center](#).



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